A study on the Cultural Role of Nowruz in the Enhancement of National Identity for Iranian People

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Abstract

The main purpose of this research is to recognize the cultural role of Nowruz in Iranian national identity. Cultural expression is an important element for national identity. In this article, the role of conventions and behaviors in the Nowruz -as a subset of cultural appearances- in the enhancement of national identity for Iranian people is dealt with according to the theories of Miller and Geertz. Understanding the conventions and behaviors of Nowruz is important in that it provides the opportunity for the enhancement of national identity and its preservation, which can act as a way out of cultural threats. This article uses the documentative historical analysis method to answer such questions as “how Nowruz conventions influence the enhancement of Iranian national identity?” and”how Nowruz behaviors influence the enhancement of national identity?” In order to answer these questions, cultural expressions of Nowruz are studied in two parts, namely conventions and behaviors. Findings show that there is a close relationship between cultural conventions of Nowruz and the enhancement of Iranian national identity. In this regard, we can note several functions for these conventions and behaviors, such as increasing hope and happiness, enhancing positive attitude to life, strengthening family relationships and enhancing national coherence.

Keywords: Nowruz, conventions, rituals, national identity, cultural role, national coherence.
Introduction

One of the honors of every nation which is an indication of cultural and civilizational background and structure of its ceremonies, especially those ceremonies that has become special by composing with believes, rituals and conventions of nations, so that the nation has a real identity and otherwise becomes alienated. Having multi-millennium background, Iran has the honor of having such conventions as Nowruz, which is concurrent with renewing the nature (Loloei, 2001: 18). In fact, Nowruz is one of the oldest Iranians ceremonies that no political and social incident has been able to alter it (Hakemi and Nazeri, 2012, 57-58). So the Iranians kings celebrated Nowruz at the beginning of spring with a special glory (Ghandehari, 2010: 57-58).

Therefore, since future Iranians civilization is dependent on the status of its cultural elements in its geographical arena on the one hand, and Iranian culture with its rituals and behaviors as has created a common cultural sense in various subcultures and geographical locations on the other hand, a common identity has been created for various ethnicities in Iran. This is one aspect of Iran that makes it different from other nations (Hakemi and Nazeri, 2011: 96). The secret lying behind the immortality of Iranians culture is that it has always been in the face of cultural threats, but it has been able to keep its rituals, myths, symbols and behaviors that have been fixed throughout the history and acted as a binding rope for coherence of the nature and provide historical integrity for the nation (Naghibzadeh, 2006: 2). Therefore, in this article, cultural expressions of Nowruz, as a symbol of Iranian culture, are dealt with in two categories, namely conventions and behaviors in terms of their role in the enhancement of national identity and coherence. Hence, two main questions have been dealt with in this research as follows:

1. What is the role of Nowruz conventions and rituals in the enhancement of national identity?
2. What is the role of Nowruz behaviors in the enhancement of national identity?

Methodology

The researchers has taken the qualitative approach and used documentative analysis method. Therefore, the authors have attempted to use the documents and the evidences relevant to the subject of the research in order to answer the research questions. The information needed for the analysis was obtained from various sources such as books, articles websites, etc.

Theoretical framework

a. Nowruz and national identity

Nowruz is one of the oldest happy-time rituals for Iranian people. Throughout the millennia of civilization history, this ritual has become one of the most important cultural symbols for Iranian nation and acted as an axis for preserving national identity (Makouei, 2011: 7). In fact, Nowruz, as an element for empowering national identity, is a political, economical, social, and most importantly, a cultural incident, because it plays a role in every aspect of people’s life in Iran. Another feature of Nowruz is that it belongs to all the people, so that no
races, languages, regions and social status play a determinant role in holding it and everyone plays his/her role in its promulgation. (Gholizadeh, 2013: 21).

In addition, Nowruz and its rituals are not limited to a certain village, city or region. Rather, it is celebrated everywhere throughout the geography of Iran. In short, if we can simulate the original Iranian culture to a person, Nowruz is the heart of such person (Honari, 1998: 65). The major functions of Nowruz are to provide unity and enhancement of coherence, unanimity and national identity. The role of Nowruz in providing unity is evident in every aspect of this convention.

Furthermore, Nowruz is a binding ceremony that is not even limited to the Iranians land. Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan and many other areas that have historical dependence to Iranian culture and civilization also celebrate it. Since 3000 years ago, Nowruz ceremony is held in all of those areas (Zahir Aziz, 2010: 59-60).

1. Theories of national identity – cultural identity

2-1 Miller’s theory of national identity
Miller believes that national identity is a form of feeling dependence to a certain nation that owns specified symbols, conventions, holy places, rituals, heroes, history, land, and a certain culture. Miller states that it is necessary to make clear the concept of nation in order to understand national identity (Miller, 1995: 253). He believes that the society differentiates its identity from other nations by a certain general culture. Miller specifies the following features for national identity:

1. It necessitates the participation of interested parties in some cases, that is, a set of features that can be considered as a general common culture.
2. It is based on the belief that a nation emerges when its members accept each other and believe that they have features in common.
3. It makes a coherent history. Nations inclination refers to the test
4. It is active. Nations and communities that act together will get the desired results surely.
5. It is a bind between a group of people to a geographical place (Ghaderzadeh, 2009: 18-19).

2-2 Clifford Geertz’s theory of national identity
Geertz’s understanding of cultural assumptions is based on the principle that collective identities are based on dependence to social being’s cultural assumption. He showed that how prevenient binds live with conventional and civil binds even in an industrial society. Geertz distinguishes between two powerful impetuses for African and Asian new states:

1. An identity based on empowering the attachment to relatives, race, language, symbols, religion, rituals, customs and land.
2. The efficiency and the stability that may be found in civil and political new binds (Hajiani, 2009: 69).

Geertz believes that culture implies hidden patterns that can be found in symbols transferred historically. Culture does not only help us to define ourselves, but also acts as a tool for us to develop our knowledge of life and its various attitudes (Geranpayeh, 2009: 28-78).
The theory that this article refers to is Miller's theory. Miller believes that in order for the national identity to become clear, we should understand the concept of nation well. He believes that a community distinguishes nationality from other sources of identity by a certain general culture and its conventions, rituals, behaviours, etc. Furthermore, the authors refer to Geertz’s theory to obtain an understanding of cultural identity. Geertz believes that cultural assumptions are based on the principle that collective identities are based on dependence to social being’s cultural assumption.

According to the above-mentioned theories, we can conclude that the more powerful the culture and its expressions in a nation, the more powerful than the more coherent its national identity. Iranian culture is a set of conventions rituals believes values and norms behaviors and knowledges that the nation has in common, making the nation differentiated from other nations and bringing various ethnicities together on the common title. Since dealing with all the aspects of the Iranian culture is not possible, in this research, Nowruz is dealt with as a symbol of Iranian culture. The following sections deal with business conventions and behaviors on one side, and their role in empowering national identity on the other side.

b. Nowruz conventions and their role in empowering national identity

The unifying role of Nowruz is evident in its rituals one by one (Bolookbashi, 2001: 10). In fact, every constituting element of Nowruz conventions has played a role in shaping Iranian people’s cultural life, giving them an identity. Among such rituals as Chaharshanbesoori, growing grass, Khanehtekani, Haftsin and Sizdahbedar are the most outstanding ones that have a role in cultural identification, making unifying binds for community members and providing happy times for families.

1. Chaharshanbesoori and its role in enhancing national identity

Nowruz excitement begins from the last wednesday of the year. The important issue is the special behaviors of this ceremony, some of which are done similarly in all areas and some are different in various areas of Iran. This difference in the context of unity is a sign of a national soul and coherence between people derived from certain convention (Bakhtiar, 2005: 17-18). The ritual is made of three stages as below:

1-1 Before jumping over fire

People clean their houses before participating in this ceremony. The word new and often white clothes, gather relatives and bouquet special food for this night (Bakhtirari, 2005: 18)

1-2 When jumping over fire

Near the sunset, people come together in house yards and streets around fires, strengthening their relations and friendships (Simai, 2008: 1311-1312).
1.3 After jumping over fire

The ceremony includes *spooning* (ghashoghzani), *ash-e morad* (wish pottage), *fal-goosh* (Bakhtgoshaei), Falgoosh and Shalandazi.

**Spooning and wish pottage (Aash-e morad)**

In this convention, those women have any wish pick up a bowl made of copper and stand in front of seven houses, hitting the bowl by a spoon. People put money or food in their bowls. Spooners cook some pottage with the ingredients that they have gained through this ritual. If they don't get anything, they become disappointed from achieving what they wish. Sometimes young people put their black cloth on their heads and poke fun at their relatives by standing in front of their house doors (Bolookbashi, 2001: 60). This ritual is still held in such cities as Shiraz and Tehran. Thereby, wealthy people have the opportunity to make poor people happier at the charitable time of Nowruz. These courses of action bring people together in the society and make them more coherent as a society (Simaei, 2008: 1308).

This ritual has two amusing and non-amusing aspect, both ways increasing national identity. In the amusing aspect, i.e. young people gathering and going to the people's doors, the ritual can make people happy by providing a fun time and thereby enhancing social binds and consequently increase the sense of national identity. Furthermore, it is a way for sharing happiness with poor people and helping them be happy at the beginning of the new year. Such kinds of rituals ignore people’s social class and enhance the coherence of the society. All in all, chahrshanbesoori has been always a symbol of Iranian people’s unity during its long history (Bakhtiari, 2005: 59). Respecting this group ritual as a cultural value leads Iranian people to swear with their ancestors annually for respecting ancient believes and rituals. This ritual includes respecting values such as family relationships, creating group excitement, forgetting miffs, helping the poor, visiting each other, and finally, creating empathy and providing the society with strong binds. Respecting these principles in this ritual plays an outstanding role in national unity and strengthens national identity.

1.2.3 Fal-goosh (boloni)

One of the sweetest rituals in 4shn is soothsaying. In this ritual, young women gather and bring a boloni (some kind of cruse). Each woman puts something along with a piece of paper containing a Hafez lyric. Then, the child girl picks up one thing and a piece of paper. The poem will be an omen for the thrower of that thing (Bakhtiari, 2005 85-86). The ritual has been narrated another way, in which young people make a wish about their own marriage, standing beside a intersection and listening to people who are crossing the street. They take the first thing they hear from the passengers as the result of their wish (Bakhtiari, 2005 85-86). This ritual has an important role in enhancing national identity so that rehearsing Hafez’s lyrics is a cultural element that plays an important role in enforcing the coherence of people through providing common collaborative senses.

1.2.3 making wish for ready-for-marriage girls (Bakhtgoshaei)

Until a few decades ago, the women in conventional families performed the following activities, wishing a good matrimony life for their young unmarried girls in the future:
1. Women send their young girls out symbolically from the house, hoping for them to go to her husband’s home in the new year.
2. Before the sunset, mothers go to the city's tannery and pour a bowl of water on her daughter’s head.
3. Young girls would ask from the first shop that is faced towards Kabeh “do you have espand (Peganum harmala)?”, and without buying it, go to the 7th store, buying some censing it (Honari, 1998: 93).

Although this ritual is based on superstition (Bakhtiari, 2010: 74), this is an attempt to provide a bind between man and woman, hoping the constitution of the family, which is again an attempt to empower national identity, because family plays an important role in the society. Therefore, after all, Nowruz, is a family symbol in addition to its national and conventional aspects. In this ceremony, all family members, especially women, are put at the centre. Furthermore, all the rituals are held in the context of home. All Iranians families prepare themselves for Nowruz at the same time, all of them provide hospitality for other families, and every home is a unit of independent national identity.

**Dangling shawl (shalandazi)**

This ritual, which is mainly held in the western provinces of Iran, includes going to the roofs of neighbor houses after lighting fire, dangle a shawl to the room. The householder puts something that shawl and says “pull it! God give your wish”. In Orumiyeh, those who have a fiancé, dangle a shawl named “salmakh” to the roof of their fiancés’ houses. The fiancé’s mother puts some green grass in the shawl and thereby wishes a fresh and pleasant life for them (Nohekhan, 2010, 27).

In recent decades, the described rituals have provided the possibilities for managers and constituting families (Simaei, 2008 1310). Shalandazi also intends to bind the man and the woman. Therefore, it plays an important role in enhancing national identity, because in Iranian convention, family is the base of life.

2. **Khanetakani and its role in strengthening national identity**

The base of the rituals that precede Nowruz is cleaning the home and the work environment, procuring the requirements of holding Nowruz ceremony (Mirshokrai, 2009 50). This ritual is a sign of hygiene and it is required for people's health (niknazar and hasannejad, 2010: 10). Today, khanetakani is the sign of beginning of the new year. Iranian people do it all around the world and believe that they should be neat to begin a good year (Nazeri and Hakemi, 2012: 106).

In most regions, cleaning homes is done with the cooperation of relatives and neighbors (Makouei, 2011: 21). In fact, all the usual Nowruz conventions are cooperative, creating affection and reconciliation. This cooperation is not confined to the families, but it is done with the cooperation of social institutions. For example, the municipality of Tehran calls for participation for this ceremony every year (Rooholamini, 2006, 54-55). The hygiene is one of the most important bases of health and welfare for a human being and it is one of the common issues for all (Hakemi and Nazeri: 2012 106). This is a factor of social development and consequently leads to enhancing national identity through improving the country’s overall capability.
3. Growing grass and its role in enhancing national identity

This ritual is a symbol of reproduction and renewal in nature and in everything. It is held in most areas of Iran. Grass is one of the seven symbols that make Haft-sin (Makouei, 2011: 55). Families keep this grass as a symbol of growth until the 13th day of the new year, throwing it in a flowing water on that day (Rooholamini, 2008: 55-56).

This Nowruz ritual, just as other rituals, is held in all Iranian houses, because people strongly believe in it as a symbol of hope for the new year to be productive. In addition, it acts as a symbol of respecting the environment and the nature. This is strongly in line with modern requirements of life, having an important role to play in enhancing national identity.

4. The haft-sin ritual and its role in enhancing national identity

Nowadays, there are seven elements on this table, whose names begin with the “s” sound. These elements include things such as Apple (sib), service (Senjed), grass (Sabzeh), shumac (Somagh), garlic (Sir), vinegar (Serkeh) and Samanoo (Rooholamini, 2008: 56). In addition the above-mentioned elements, the table is ornamented with other elements such as mirror, candle, colored egg, redfish, alyssum, coin (sekkeh) and religious book (ibid). In fact, among, this ritual is the most mysterious, every element of which carry various meanings (Makouei: 2011: 56). For example, apple is a symbol of beauty and health, service is a symbol of affection (Rastegar Fesani: 2000: 80). These valuable meanings cause unity among people in terms of identity. In short, if Nowruz is one of the properties of Iranian identity, Haft-sin is its hub (Hakemi and Nazeri, 2012 103).

Two unifying functions can be considered for this ritual in Nowruz ceremony: (1) binding the past and the present in the framework of a flowing social role, which is realized by a strong belief about the descension of god’s and ancestors’ souls to the present, participating the ceremony and providing some kind of blessing to the people's life (Bolookbashi, 2013: 53-54). In addition, it is necessary for all family members to gather around the table. This in turn causes the members to reconcile and forget miffs. Needless to say, this would make society more coherent.

Therefore, Nowruz plays an important role in keeping the foundation of families and health to stay coherent forever. People return to their homes anywhere they are, holding the ceremony with other family members around the table. According to popular believes, if someone is absent on his/her family’s haft-sin table, he/she would be far from his/her family all the year. This ritual is so important that even Iranians that are leaving abroad come together and hold it as a necessity. This can be a sign that can make Iranian people believe in a common culture and common mythical symbols as the most important element for the unity of the nation.

5. Sizdahbedar and its role in enhancing national identity

The 13th day is alas the of Nowruz ceremonies. In this day, people go out and spend a day in the nature (Bolookbashi, 2001: 89). People prepare themselves from the 12th day together with their relatives and go out of the city to spend the day in the nature, chitchatting, playing games, sightseeing, etc. (ibid: 97). In Shiraz, people begin the ceremony together with relatives and believe that being together will diminish abominations. Most games played on
this day our collective games such as wrestling, horse-riding, donkey-riding, etc (Nohekhan 2010: 75). In the evening on the 13th day, young girls tie the grass hoping to find a good husband the new (ibid: 74). They sing the conventional song at this time that includes a hope to have a child in the next Nowruz (Simaei, 2008 1404).

This ritual finishes the Nowruz ceremonies. School holidays end and from the next day, students should begin their school activities in the New Year. People live with the memories of Nowruz ceremony for a few months and try to maintain their good morale by keeping the wishes they've had during Nowruz. Furthermore, performing collective rituals in every year helps keeping the collective morale of the people and enforces social coherence life.

In fact, sizdahbedar is an attempt to create and promulgate affection between people. It's an opportunity for people to come together, reconcile, think about the future and even found a new life. Happiness and freshness affects and encourages creativity and dynamicity. Therefore, it is ultimately a factor that enhances national identity. A scrutiny in the history of all history would show that happiness is the main factor of advancements in all areas of social life, especially culture and economy, and a powerful culture empowers national identity.

The Nowruz behaviors and their role in enhancing national identity

Nowruz is one of the most beautiful rituals of all time on the Globe. It is followed main impetuses of Iranians culture and civilization and it is in line with ethics and courtesy, having special rituals (Olouni, 2009: 11). In the following chapters of this article, we'll study some Nowruz behaviors, including meeting each other, preparing Nowruz chows, giving out gifts, travels, etc., along with their role in enhancing national identity.

Nowruz chows and their role in enhancing national identity

In Iran, every ceremony usually brings its special chows (Rooholamini: 2008 10-12). Nowruz chows can be categorized into four categories, namely chaharshabesoori chows, candies, nuts, Nowruz fruit, Nowruz eve meal, and sizdahbedar chows.

Chaharshabesoori chows

Chaharshabesoori is celebrated with special chows, the most common of which are nuts and a special pottage (Bakhtiari, 2005: 105). Chaharshabesoori nuts: until a few decades ago, women who had wish procure a mix of seven nuts and distributed on the last wednesday of the old year (Simaei, 2008: 1312). Such a mix included fig, dates, dried berries, hazelnut, pistachio and almond (nohekhan, 2010. 30). Still some families make this mix and distribute it among neighbors and passengers, hoping that divine powers solve their problems for this bounty (Simaei, 2008: 1312). Nowadays, is makes it procured for the ceremony for merely exciting purposes (Bolookbashi, 2001: 62). This is done concurrent with roaring and jumping over fire (Matooofi, 2009: 172). At this night, after the fire goes off, all family members sit together with happiness. Elders say goodbye to the cold winter by telling stories, students listen to the stories happy from the upcoming holidays, while mothers bring the mixed nuts (Nohekhan, 2010: 30). Making the mixed nuts is a group work that is done with the participation of relatives. Therefore, it can play an considerable role in empowering social binds. Furthermore, people come together with a common
intention and emotion, praying for others and themselves together. This can play an important role in creating and empowering collective soul in particular, and enhancing national identity in general.

Chahrshanbehsoori pottage: cooking pottage is another collective rituals in the most areas of Iran. This meal contains many kinds of seeds and vegetables, cooked with the hope that the next year be rich of all kinds of foods. Doing this ritual also contains a collective morale and makes people more caring about each other, empowering binds between them. People that have a problem or a wish cook another pottage at this night. This pottage is called “aboodorda”. They give a bowl of the pottage to the sick person and distribute the rest among other people, hoping to overcome the problem or illness (Bolookbashi, 2001: 62). The important point is that some persons go to peoples’ doors anonymously and call for help in cooking the meal. Therefore, this is again a collective ritual (Simaei, 2006: 1311). Such rituals bring people together to help each other and feed the poor, creating unity and enhancing national identity.

**Nowruz candies, nuts and foods**

For Nowruz days, people procure candies fruit and nuts from several days before Nowruz. Fruits such as pomegranate, orange, apple and cucumber are procured. Nowruz nuts include several kinds of nuts and dried fruits such as pistachio, hazelnut, dried peach dried apple and dried banana. This makes it different in some cities (Simaei, 2008: 1331). These fruits and nuts are put on the haft-sin with special decoration (Honari: 1999: 137). Procurement of these fruits and nuts is done collectively. In some cities, women come together to cook conventional cookies and help each other in that. For example, in Gorgan, neighbors make big celebration to cook such cookies and candies together. Coming together makes a happy time for them and give them some special kind of relaxation. Meanwhile, those people who have huffed have to reconcile during the cooperation opportunity that this ceremony makes. Such ceremonies bind small groups together and makes the society more coherent as a whole, enhancing national identity overall (Matoofi, 2009: 144).

Samanoo is another Nowruz chow that people gather to cook in countries such as Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Iran. It is cooked at night and people sing special songs when cooking it (gholizadeh, 2013: 20). Cooking samanoo is so important that some people believe that if it is not cooked, the man of the family would lose his power and die (Honari, 1997: 54). In fact, all people gather with the same intentions, and it is this way that social binds are strengthened and stabilized. Some people gather around the pot and rile its content while making wishes, hoping to achieve what they wish (Matoofi, 2010: 145). It is clear that how this ritual also can have an impact on enhancing national identity. Coming together and making wishes for each other causes sympathy and empowers social binds.

**Nowruz supper and lunch**

Cooking special dishes for lunch and dinner is one of the rituals in Nowruz. Most Nowruz dishes include rice. Historically, rice has been a luxury food that has been always expensive, so that many people have had difficulties in buying it for Nowruz evening supper. Iranian people care for each other, so rich people help poor to have rice or other requirements for Nowruz (Simaei: 2008: 1336).
Today, in most Iranian cities, it’s a ritual to have rice, vegetable and fish on Nowruz evening. Also, noodle pillaw is the dish people have for Nowruz day lunch. Rice, vegetable and fish are important as the symbols of esprit and the readiness of nature for renewing itself, and noodle pillaw is a symbol of resolving problems (Simaei, 2008: 1337). Such common emotions can enhance people’s unity and provide the possibility of enhancing national identity.

**Sizdahbedar chows**

Iranian people prepare special foods for Sizdahbedar from the previous day (Honari, 1998: 158). Chows for this day include dill pilaw, bean pillaw, lettuce, vinegar-honey and fruit (Bolookbashi, 2011: 97). Noodle potage (ash-e-reshteh) and potted vegetable (Ghormeh-sabzi) are two meals people eat for this day (Nohekhan, 2010: 73). In Gorgan- a northeastern city of Iran– people eat acanthus in addition to the mentioned meals (Matooﬁ, 2010: 209). Most foods people eat for this day includes vegetables, which is a symbol of renewing in nature in the spring. This day is called ‘the nature day” in Iranian calendar, because people deal with everything that can be a symbol of nature in a collective and social ceremony. Such rituals bring people together and enhance the sense of unity and common national identity.

**Nowruz visits and their role in enhancing national identity**

From the first day of new year, people go to relatives’ homes for visiting. Following that is a revisit from the visited family. Such family parties are held until the 13th day and even long into the night. This has been done in Iran from the ancient era (Bolookbashi, 2001: 82). Such visits include visiting parents, relatives, wise people, coworkers, neighbors, etc. (Ayat Mirdamadi, 2013: 87-96). Such visits have been cited as the most important function of Nowruz celebration (Makouei, 2011, 71-73). The most important feature of such visits is removing miffs and renewing friendship, sometimes with the intervention of elders.

Another feature of these celebrations is the wishes people make for each other. That provides a hopeful morale for people and makes them more united and coherent. All of these strengthens the relationships between people and makes them more identified as a nation.

3. **Nowruz travels and their role in enhancing national identity**

Knowing that the nature is renewing in spring, Nowruz is a good time for traveling. New year travels creates enthusiasm in families (Gholizadeh, 2013: 17). People travel anyhow they can during Nowruz days, by their own cars or train bus, etc. Nowruz is the best time for traveling to the southern provinces of Iran. Some people prefer to visit holy shrines in these days. Elders that have newly found a son-in-law or a daughter-in-law stay in their homes for the first week to visit their new relatives and travel after that in the second week (Simaei, 2008: 1322).

4. **Giving out Nowruz gifts and the role in enhancing national identity**

There is a Nowruz convention that older people give gifts to their younger relatives. Sometimes, if they want to give money, they put the paper money in the Holy Quran, believing that the divine power of Quran makes the year more productive for the person that
receives the money (Sarmad, 2007: 81). In Isfahan, children kiss their parents’ hands when sitting around the Haftsin table, receiving some money from them with nice wishes (Makouei, 2011: 95). People also give gift to their subordinates or poor coworkers (Rooholamini, 2010: 67). It is clear that the convention of giving gifts can empower the relationships between people based on affection and goodwill. That’s how Nowruz can be an opportunity for providing good moments and recalling good habits, providing a happy productive society.

Conclusion

Miller and Geertz have based their theories on the principle of direct relation between cultural expressions in a country and the coherence of national identity, so that the more powerful is a culture and its expressions in a nation, the more powerful is its national identity. Iranian culture, with its special rituals and ceremonies that focus on binding people together has created a sense of unity among people with different ethnicities in different national regions. That has given a unique identity to the people all across the land with even different languages. Findings of this research show that Nowruz is the most important cultural convention in Iran. This convention has greatly more than any other convention- affected the maintenance of cultural norms, social coherence and order in a multi-cultural society. In other words, Nowruz is the head of Iranian identity. Another important finding of this research is that each and every Nowruz ritual can show the uniting role of this convention. In fact, every element of Nowruz rituals has somehow impacted the cultural structure of people’s life in Iran. Most important rituals are chaharshanbesoori, growing grass, Khanetekani, setting the Haftsin table and gathering in the 13th day of the new year in the nature. Furthermore, Nowruz behaviors such as providing special chows, giving out gifts and Nowruz visits were found to be the most influential behaviors on Iranian people’s national identity.

On how Nowruz and its cultural expressions impact national identity, the authors believe that Nowruz is a charitable time in which many Iranian cultural, ethical and human values are realized. The originality of the family and focusing on it as the pivot, visiting relatives and respecting elders, understanding social conventions and rituals, paying attention to the poor, kindness and loving each other, affection to children, hygiene and cleanliness, resolving disagreements and reconciling people, condoling mournful people and making a happy atmosphere in the beginning of new year realize in Nowruz. All these ethical values are seen in Nowruz conventions and rituals as the symbol of Iranian identity. We can consider such functions as enhancing hope, happiness and positive thinking, strengthening family relationships, unity and social coherence for these conventions and behaviors. Thus, Iranian people should try to maintain this cultural heritage in order to be able to make use of their innate powers for enhancing national unity. If a nation is to defend the confinements of their country that is exposed to cultural aggression, they should seriously respect its conventions and believes as the axis of unity.
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